

**IRRAWADDY DOLPHINS *ORCAELLA BREVIROSTRIS* (OWEN IN GRAY) FROM SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND.** *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 42(2): 554, 1998:- The Irrawaddy dolphin is an inshore species regularly recorded from north Queensland. Most Queensland Museum records derive from shark nets (Paterson, 1994). The previous southernmost record is QMJM10574 from Bundaberg (24° 52'S, 152° 21'E). We report sightings, presumably of Irrawaddy dolphins, from the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers in June/July 1997 and a confirmed record for the species based on the collection of a carcass on 23 July, 1997 from the Brisbane R. at Karana Downs (27° 32'S, 152° 49'E).

Dolphins were sighted on three separate occasions from ~ 11-22 June at the Moggill Ferry in the turbid upper tidal reaches of the Brisbane R. (72km from the mouth). A pair was seen initially and the two subsequent sightings were of single animals. On 24 June a single animal was seen from 10am-noon near Kookaburra Park, Karana Downs (82.5km from the mouth). It passed the observation point 5-6 times and appeared to be chasing mullet in the relatively clear water. It was lighter grey than a bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and to one observer it was 'ghostly coloured', and to another 'looked like it might have been sick'. It was approached by canoe and noted as 'very pale ... even pink or greyish pink ... with a big forehead'. Photography (Fig. 1) confirmed a blow and a blunt, rounded forehead with no obvious beak. A dolphin, presumably the same animal, was seen the next day at that location. On 17 July a further sighting was reported from the Bremer R., the major tributary of the Brisbane R., 3.4km from the junction, a point 1.3km upstream from the Moggill Ferry. The observers, the crew of the coal barge C.R. Campbell, did not note specific characteristics. Contact was maintained for 20 min. as the animal moved downstream. The crew considered the sighting unusual, as dolphins are rarely encountered upstream from the Gateway Bridge (10km from the mouth of the Brisbane R.).

On 20 July a dolphin carcass was found floating in the Karana Downs section of the Brisbane R. ~ 85km from the mouth. This is ~ 4km below the limit of tidal influence (Steele, 1990). The decomposed 1.98m long specimen was collected by RAP and SVD. Sex and cause of death could not be determined. The skull (Fig. 2) and skeleton registered as QMJM11976, clearly establish the dolphin as an adult *Orcaella brevirostris* [for diagnostic characters see Arnold & Heinsohn (1996)].

All observations and the collection of QMJM11976 occurred in essentially freshwater (Davie, 1990). This and the descriptions on 24 June are typical of *O. brevirostris* (Cawardine, 1995).



FIG. 1. Presumed *Orcaella brevirostris* at Karana Downs, Brisbane River 24 June, 1997.

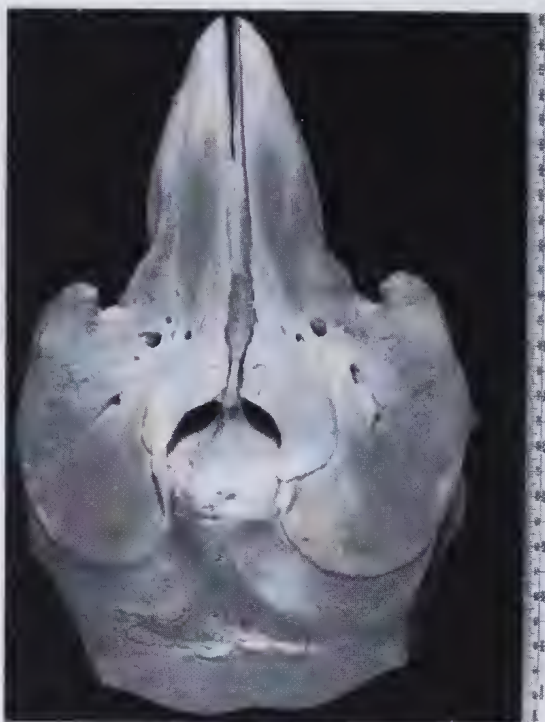


FIG. 2. Skull (dorsal aspect) of QMJM11976.

Public interest created reflects the unusual occurrence of dolphins in the upper tidal reaches of the Brisbane R. Accordingly, although this record extends the distribution of *O. brevirostris*, it is likely that the dolphins were vagrants.

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